



# ADDITUDE

## **9** WAYS To Have More **Success** **at School**

For Families Living with ADHD, Dyslexia  
and Other Learning Disabilities

# Success at School

Welcome to the 2007 edition of *ADDitude's* Back-to-School handbook. We hope you had a great summer and are looking forward to the school year ahead.

September can be fraught with anxiety as you ready yourself and your child for the next nine months of school. But it is also a time of beginnings. You and your child want this to be the best year yet—and it can be. To help you start the school year right, we've talked to parents, teachers, and other professionals and asked: What's your best advice?

From Susan Schwartz, of the NYU Child Study Center in New York City, we learned how to build your child's reading skills—whether he's six or 16. Because homework can be such a headache for families with ADD, we've found good advice in *Quirky Kids*, by Drs. Perri Klass and Eileen Costello, on turning it into a manageable task. And we didn't forget the social skills kids need. See Dr. Carol Brady's piece on recess. Rounding off this section are tips for teachers and resources for you.

You are part of our *ADDitude* community, and we want your tips and ideas, triumphs and concerns about school—and any other topics. Write to us at [letters@additudemag.com](mailto:letters@additudemag.com)—we want to hear from you!

All the best,  
The Editors



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# Ready, Set, Go!

Every step you take this summer—before classes begin—will bring you closer to a stress-free start of the school year. **BY JENNIFER JONES, PH.D.**



- ❑ **Review your child's IEP or 504 Plan.** Just as our kids master new skills and face new challenges each year, the accommodations they receive from school will need to grow with them. Read your child's current IEP or 504 Plan. Consider which goals have been met and which areas remain trouble spots. Then, schedule a team meeting before the start of the school year. Bring copies of all educational assessments, report cards, notes from the teacher, even individual tests and homework assignments—anything that will illustrate your child's current achievement level. Discuss the goals you'll focus on this year, the strategies that worked last year, and the ones that didn't.
- ❑ **Organize school systems together.** Visit an office-supply store and check out the materials you can use to organize papers, supplies, and time. Choose systems that will be easy enough for your child to manage independently at school and at home. Agree to experiment to find the right fit.
- ❑ **Stock up on school supplies.** Assume that your child will eventually need poster board or a protractor, buy lots of needs now, and store them where you can easily find them later. To get a sense of the projects your child will need supplies for, talk with the parent of a child who's one grade ahead of yours.
- ❑ **Consider this year's after-school activities.** Would your child benefit from more physical activity? Consider sports or dance. Does he need to practice focusing and recalling information? Why not join a chess club? Try to build on your child's routines with activities that will enhance his strengths and provide opportunities for working on tasks he finds challenging.
- ❑ **Find a tutor or homework helper.** If you feel that your child might benefit from help, find one now. Test-drive several candidates for personality and skill. Don't choose a tutor who encourages dependence in your child. The goal is to give your child ways to meet challenges on his own.
- ❑ **Make a calendar.** Being able to foresee deadlines gives children a sense of control over their lives. Start by having a conversation with your child about daily, weekly, and monthly schedules. Discuss and agree on predictable routines, school, extracurricular and social activities, and other events that you and your child would like to pursue. The more input your child has about his time-management plan, the more likely he will follow through.
- ❑ **Review medication.** Was your child off medication during the summer break? If so, you may want to restart it a week or two before school begins. Ask your doctor.
- ❑ **Set goals together.** Sit down with your child and brainstorm what he might achieve in the next school year. Focus on strengths, as well as on areas that need improvement. Make the goals attainable. Meeting goals empowers children and enables them to meet tougher challenges later.



JENNIFER JONES, PH.D., is the CEO and founder of LearnGarden ([learngarden.com](http://learngarden.com)) and the author of *The Three P's of Parenting: Advice for a Lifetime* (Teachers College Press).



# 10 Conversations to Have at the Start of the Year

To make the most of the coming school year, talk to your child, your teacher, your doctor, other parents, your family—and yourself. **BY ANNIE SOFIELD REED**



## **1** Talk with your child, and accentuate the positive.

If your child has ADD, she may have low self-esteem. To succeed in school, she must not only adhere to academic and behavioral standards, she must believe in herself. Educate your child about her condition and present the upside of it. For example, ADD often correlates with traits such as creativity. As she meets new faces and new challenges at school, help her remember that she is a valuable member of her classroom community—in spite of, or because of, her difference.

## **3** Help your child learn to appreciate the teacher.

Your child may feel that teachers are the enemy. Help her find something to appreciate about her teacher. My son and I developed a theory about his fifth-grade teacher; we credited her ability to be understanding to her experience as a parent. My son has appreciated other teachers for their taste in music or movies. Children should have a sense of teachers as humans, not merely as authorities. When your child thinks, “She’s strict, but she’s cool,” what she means is, “We can work together.”

## **2** Ask your child about his friends.

He may need your help in identifying classmates with whom he could develop constructive friendships. During the first weeks of school, ask your child to describe his classmates, and listen for clues about personalities that might complement his own. Children with ADD tend to form quick alliances with children they find exciting or interesting. Encourage your child to get to know the self-contained and studious kids, who might admire his imagination or boldness and who might be a calming influence.

## **4** Talk with the teacher.

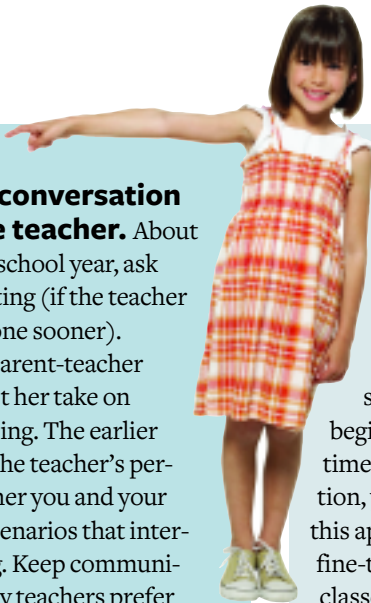
Have a conversation with your child’s teacher during the first week of school. Without coming off as pushy, clarify the specifics of your child’s situation. Make sure she knows about your child’s IEP or 504 Plan, if there’s one in place. Any mandated services or accommodations should begin immediately, and the classroom teacher is the one who can make sure that happens.



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### 5 Have a second conversation with the teacher.

About a month into the school year, ask for a second meeting (if the teacher hasn't called for one sooner). Don't wait until parent-teacher conferences to get her take on how things are going. The earlier you are aware of the teacher's perspective, the sooner you and your child can avoid scenarios that interfere with learning. Keep communication open. Many teachers prefer e-mail as a way to share information.



### 6 Talk with your child's doctor.

If your child is taking medication, or if you are considering a trial of ADHD medicine, have a conversation with the prescribing doctor in late summer and make a plan for the beginning of school. If this is the first time your child will be taking medication, you may want to start soon after this appointment, so you'll be able to fine-tune the dose and timing before classes begin. If your child has taken medication before, he can resume shortly before school starts.

### 7 Have a second conversation with the doctor.

After a few weeks of school, you should have another conversation with your child's psychiatrist or prescribing doctor. In this conversation, perhaps held over the phone, you and the doctor can review the information you get from your child, his teacher, and your own observations to decide if the current course of medication is right.

### 8 Talk with other parents.

The new school year brings new chances to talk with other parents at drop-off and pick-up, playdates, back-to-school night, and other events. How much should you say about your child's diagnosis? This is a personal choice, which you might base on your ease in discussing such matters, your child's wishes, and your sense of how the information might be received. Based on personal experience, I advocate disclosure without shame. I find that other parents are generally supportive. If you share your struggles, you are inviting other parents to share with you—and to lean on you, as well. If your child knows that you believe in speaking openly, he is less likely to feel that he is bearing a shameful secret.

### 9 Talk with your family.

Have conversations with everyone in your family. Such talks can, of course, occur at any point, but the start of the school year is a good time to review certain understandings. ADHD affects your family dynamics. Your child may not be the only person in the family with ADD. Share your experiences with each other. Have your child describe to his relatives what ADD feels like. Ask him to tell everyone what kind of support is helpful. Have family members talk about what their challenges are and what support they need. If everyone puts their heads together, positive things develop.

### 10 Talk with yourself (and your spouse).

Alone, or with your spouse, review what you've learned about your child in the last year. What helped him toward success in the previous grade? What made success difficult? As your child grows, your knowledge of him grows. Maybe an old idea needs revision. Keep a current, holistic, and detailed impression of your child in mind as you move forward. Know that you may face some new challenges this year, but empower yourself as the expert on your child and trust that you'll make the right decisions.



# Advocating for Your Child

Write a letter to your child's teacher to start the year off right. Here's one parent's letter, which may give you some ideas for creating your own.

To Zachary's Teachers:

Zachary Klein will be in your class this year. Over the years, we have found it helpful to give teachers some background about him, in addition to the IEP in his file. This often ensures a successful beginning to the school year.

Zach has ADHD. He is on medication, but it doesn't change who he is, and it is more effective at helping him focus than at controlling his behavior. Zach has a great sense of humor, and tapping into this early in the year usually works well. Zach takes criticism personally and hates being yelled at. He won't always let you know it, but he worries and is very sensitive. He might act cool and tough, but, if he has had a bad day, he falls apart when he gets home.

Zach is excited about the new year. He wants to settle down and "be mature and responsible." He says this at the beginning of every year, but he can't always succeed. Last school year was a difficult one, and Zach's self-esteem is pretty beat up.

We have attached a list of things that have worked in some situations:

**1. PRAISE.** Zach responds to praise. When he receives positive reinforcement, his anxiety decreases, and he can better stay on task. It is best, when possible, to talk to Zach about misbehavior in private.

**2. FLASH PASS.** In the past, teachers have given Zach a "flash pass," so he can leave the room when he needs a break. He doesn't use it often, but knowing that he can helps him control anxiety. He may get up from time to time to get a tissue or sharpen a pencil, and this helps him settle down for the rest of the class. He gets anxious, almost to the point of claustrophobia, when he is in the same setting for too long.

**3. QUIET SPACE.** Zach has difficulty focusing for long periods of time on tests and when reading. During these extended periods, you might move him to a quieter, private space, such as a teacher's office or the hallway.

**4. ENLARGED MATH PROBLEMS.** Zach has trouble with taking math tests. He does better when tests are

enlarged, so that one or two problems are on each page. He sometimes folds his math paper into quarters, with only one problem on each quarter, to help himself focus.

**5. LIMITED IN-CLASS READING.** It is nearly impossible for Zach to read in class for any extended period of time. It is best to send reading assignments home, where reading can be done quietly.

**6. SCHEDULING FOR DIFFICULT CLASSES.** If possible, Zach's hardest classes should be scheduled in the morning hours. Concentration becomes more difficult for him as the day progresses. Teachers in his later classes should be made aware of this.

**7. LENIENCY FOR LATENESS.** Unless he's given plenty of reminders, Zach's disorganization inhibits his ability to hand work in on time. While we strive to meet deadlines, we'd appreciate leniency for late assignments.

We welcome any ideas you have to keep Zach engaged in school, while boosting his self-esteem and helping him succeed. Please contact us at any time by phone or by e-mail. We have flexible schedules and are able to meet whenever it is convenient for you. We look forward to working with you in the upcoming year.

Sincerely,  
Zach's Parents



# Setting Up a School-Day Dose

BY LARRY B. SILVER, M.D.

**I**f your child takes medication as part of his ADHD treatment, he'll likely need a dose during the school day. Although ADHD medication is available in extended-release forms that cover a full day, many children do best with a short-acting tablet in the morning and another in the afternoon, ensuring an appetite for lunch. A child who takes an extended-release capsule in the morning may need a short-acting afternoon dose to cover time spent in an after-school program.

Arranging for your child to receive medication at school or for an after-school program is a two-step process. You and the prescribing physician must complete a medication authorization form. Then, the doctor will write a prescription that provides specific instructions for labeling the pill bottle and dosing.

► **The Form:** Before the new school year begins, go to the school's front office or health room and ask for a medication authorization form. Schools cannot give this form out without a request from a parent or guardian, because they aren't permitted to recommend medication. Private schools may have their own form or may accept a form from a public school. After-school programs usually will accept the public school form.

Most forms have three parts. Part one, to be filled out and signed by the parent, authorizes the school nurse or aide to give your child medication. Part two is completed and signed by the physician. It asks him to provide information on the diagnosis, medication, time and dosage to be dispensed, and possible side effects. Part three is the school's approval of the form and is completed by an administrator.

This is an official form, so you cannot

create your own, but they typically look like the one at right.

► **The Prescription:** It's unnecessary for your doctor to write prescriptions for both home and school. But he will need to instruct the pharmacist to label a separate bottle for school use, with specific instructions for this setting. A sample prescription might look like the one below.

► **The Follow-Up:** When you drop off the bottle and the completed form at school, take some time to talk with the nurse and your child's teacher. Ask them to alert you if they notice side effects or if your child misses a dose, and to inform you about the medication's effectiveness.

Working as a team will ensure that your child's ADHD is treated appropriately throughout the school day.

LARRY SILVER, M.D., senior medical advisor to ADDitude, is a child and adolescent psychiatrist in Washington, D.C.

**MEDICATION AUTHORIZATION**

PART I: Parent or Guardian to complete

I hereby request (name of school or school system) to administer medication as directed by this authorization. I agree to release, indemnify, and hold harmless (name of school system) and any of their officers, staff members, or agents from lawsuits, claim, expense, demand, or action against them for assisting this student with medication.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

PART II: Physician must complete and sign for each medication

Diagnosis: \_\_\_\_\_

Medication: \_\_\_\_\_

Dosage to be given at school: \_\_\_\_\_ Time(s) to be given: \_\_\_\_\_

Possible Side Effects: \_\_\_\_\_

Effective Dates: From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Some forms request parent's signature in this section, as well.)

PART III: Principal or Principal Designee

**David P. Smith, M.D.**

Name: John Williams Address: 111 Elm Street, Main City, USA Date: August 1, 2007

Methylphenidate 10 mg #90

Place #20 in bottle Label: School Use One Tablet at Noon

Place #70 in bottle Label: Home Use One Tablet 3 times a day

(Signed)

# Reading Strategies That Grow with Your Child

BY SUSAN J. SCHWARTZ, M.ED.

## Early Years

For grades one through three, the object of most reading assignments is to build reading skills. You can help with the necessary practice and offer support.

► **Preview reading materials.**

Direct your child's attention to the cover, the title of the book, and the illustrations. Teach her to use these visual clues as she reads. Ask, "What do you think the book is about?" This will help your child put the words into context.

► **Read together.** Have your child read some of the book by himself, and then take turns reading aloud and listening to each other. If he stumbles on a word, say it for him, rather than insist that he struggle to decode it. If he wants to sound out the word, let him. If he needs correction, say something like, "The word is *house*, but your guessing *home* makes sense," or "The word is *house*, but your guessing *horse* shows that you know the 'h' and the 's' sounds." In other words, compliment his strategy, rather than demean his ability.

► **Review the ideas.** Every few pages, ask pertinent questions: "Who is this story mainly about? What happened first? What happened next? How do you think this story will end?" These help kids put all the pieces together when reading.

► **Play word games.** Dedicate each day or each week to mastering a specific phoneme, or word sound. For instance, find 10 things in your house that contain the "*kuh*" sound—his coat, backpack, clock, or kitten. Serve carrots, cucumbers, and milk for dinner. Find the kings and jacks in a pack of cards. Make it fun.

► **Know your child's strengths and weaknesses.** Some kids with attention problems need help decoding written words. Others find reading words easy but struggle to understand the meaning of what they read. Ask your child's teacher where he needs help. If it's decoding, incorporate letter-sound activities into your child's day. If content is the problem, help your child recognize story lines. Watching short films or reading comic books might help him to understand the concepts of plot, characters, and sequence.

► **Build vocabulary.** Talk with your child about anything that interests him, and use a mature vocabulary. Read to him for pleasure, from books that are beyond his capability but within his interest. The richer the verbal environment, the less likely he will be stumped by unfamiliar words in required reading.

► **Get help.** Consider having your child work with a mentor, coach, or learning specialist to boost his reading skills.



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## Grades Three and Up

By grade three—and through graduate school—the object of academic reading moves from learning to read to reading to learn. Most reading assignments are followed by writing assignments, or tests, to assess what the reader has learned.

Remind your child to review the purpose of each reading assignment before she begins to read. Then share these strategies for fiction and non-fiction reading.

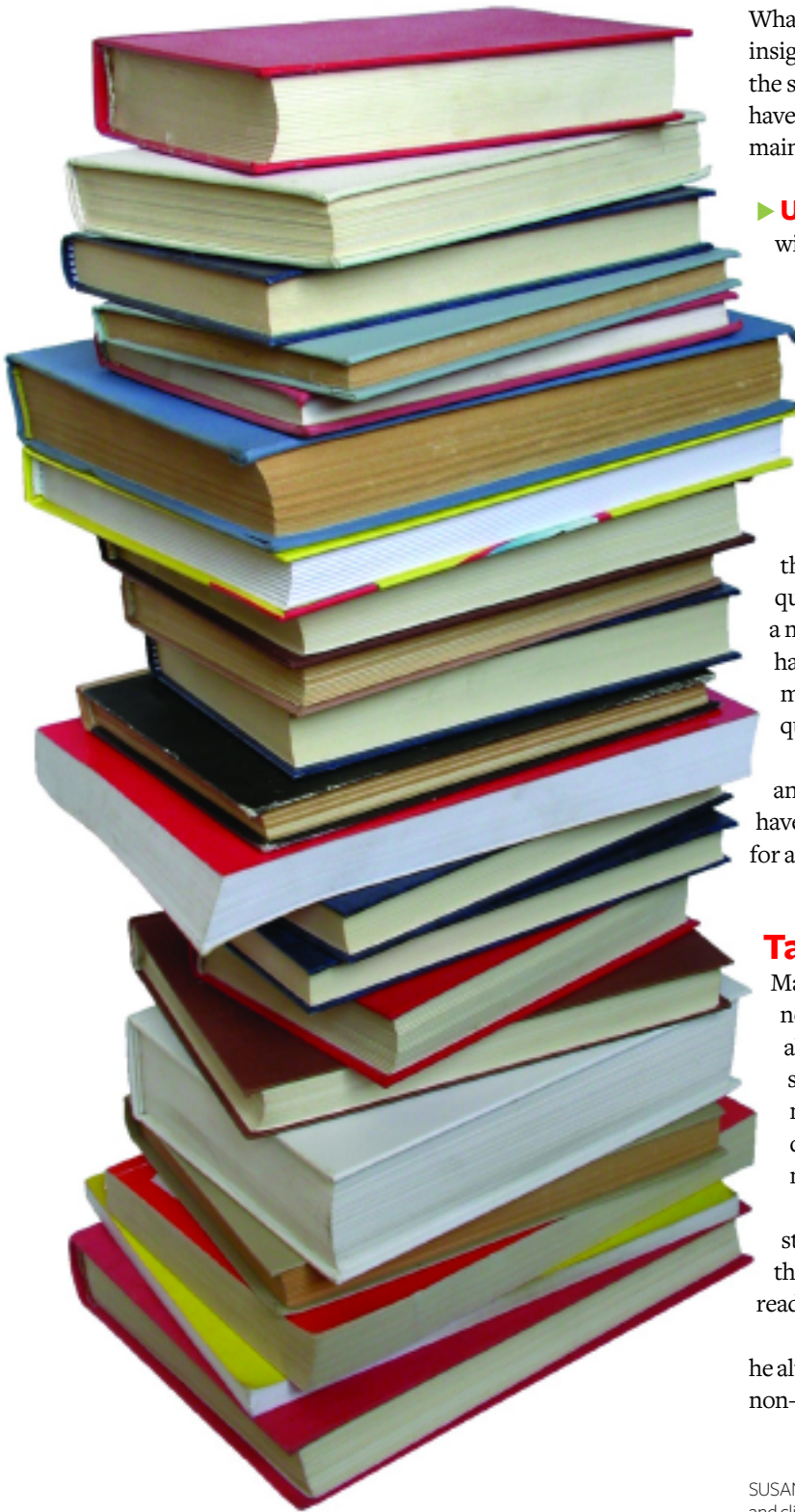


### Tips for Reading Fiction

There are two reasons that teachers assign fiction. One is to help students understand genre—to recognize science fiction or a type of poetry, for instance. The other is to write or talk about what a student has read, by analyzing a poem or producing a book report.

► **Know the assignment.** Be sure your child understands what kind of written or oral task will follow a particular reading assignment, so that she can focus her reading to that end. For example, if she must write a book report, identify the type of report she has to write. Ask, “Will your report be a retelling of the story, or will you be analyzing the characters?” Suggest that she keep notes that will help her compose her report. If the purpose of the assignment is to compare two poems, remind her to look for common themes as she reads.

► **Work as you go.** Don’t leave the gathering of information until the end of a long reading assignment. Before he reads a work of fiction, for example, have your child write WHO or MC (main character), WHERE/WHEN (setting), P (problem), and S (solution) on sticky notes. As your child reads, have him list on each note the pages that identify the introduction of a main character, the setting, a conflict or problem the character faces, and the solution to the conflict. Then ask him, “What did you read that taught you something new about the main character or the problem in the story?”



What did another character say or do that gave you information or insight about the main character? How is the setting or time that the story takes place like our hometown? Is there a character you have read about in the past who faced the same challenges as this main character?"

► **Use alternate formats.** Allow your child to follow along with books on tape or let him substitute alternate chapters from a novel with CliffsNotes or other abridged material, rather than to struggle with every reading assignment.

### Tips for Reading Non-fiction

Science and social studies textbooks require different reading strategies than those used for fiction. As your child begins a chapter or section of a textbook, point out the title and any boldfaced subheadings. These let him know what the main topics and main ideas will be. Then ask him to form a question that the subsequent paragraphs might answer. Prepare a mindset for reading each section. After reading each section, have your child summarize some of the details he learned that might support the main ideas. He will then start to answer the questions he formulated.

If the assignment is to read a chapter in a textbook and to answer questions at the end of the chapter or on a worksheet, have her read the questions first, so that she knows what to look for as she reads.

### Take Time to Plan

Many students underestimate how much time and effort are needed for a particular task. Break assignments into manageable pieces. If your child has a book report due each month, she should mark in her planner how much she needs to read each night, when she should write an outline, and when the first draft is due. A 200-page book isn't daunting if she sees that she needs to read only 20 pages a night for 10 nights.

Even daily reading assignments can be broken into smaller steps: First, scan the chapter, then write down the questions at the end of the chapter. Leave space to write the answers, then read the chapter, and answer the homework questions as you go.

If reading homework is a challenge for your child, suggest that he alternate reading assignments with math worksheets or other non-reading work.

SUSAN J. SCHWARTZ, M.Ed., is an assistant professor of child and adolescent psychiatry, and clinical director at the NYU Child Study Center in New York City. To read about ADHD research conducted at NYU, log on to [aboutourkids.org](http://aboutourkids.org)

# Social Skills 101

Practicing good playground behavior.

BY CAROL BRADY, PH.D.



**R**ecess, lunch time, and class trips are the perfect timeouts for some kids with ADD. For others, socializing outside the structure of the classroom poses problems. If your child has trouble getting along with others, role-playing can help him develop some playground savvy.

Role-playing works with almost any child who is old enough to talk. It's especially good for teaching children how to deal with teasing—a problem familiar to many kids with ADD.

Consider the case of nine-year-old Jesse, a boy I recently treated. Jesse's parents sought my help because he overreacted to playful (but hurtful) banter that came his way during recess. On one occasion, after Jesse did something silly, a playmate laughed and called him a "turkey head." Enraged, Jesse shoved the boy and burst into tears.

Jesse acknowledged the shoving, but said to me, "He started it!" He felt it was the other boy who needed to change. I explained to Jesse that he couldn't always control what other people did, but that he always had a choice of how to react. "You're the boss of yourself," I told him. This idea empowered him.

Talking things over comforted Jesse, and I decided that role-playing might help him avoid future incidents. Here are the

steps we used successfully that you might try with your child:

► **Define the problem.** Talk things over until you understand the exact nature of the problem your child's facing. Jesse's problem was that he felt angry and sad when kids called him names and couldn't stop himself from lashing out physically.

► **Acknowledge bad feelings.** Let your child know that it's normal to be upset by teasing. Jesse's parents and I made sure that he understood this—and that it was not OK for other children to pick on him.

► **Discuss alternative ways to respond.** Explain to your child that there are many ways to respond to teasing, some good and some not so good. Shoving the teaser was a bad choice. Jesse and I explored better options, including walking away and saying, "I don't care," over and over, until the teaser got bored. Ultimately, Jesse decided he'd simply say, "Please stop it." He decided that

this direct statement would give him a sense of control over the situation.

► **Reenact the situation.** Once you've armed your child with socially acceptable ways to respond, let him play the role of the child being teased while you play the teaser. Then switch roles, varying the "script" to explore the different ways in which the scenario could play out.

► **Celebrate success.** If your child comes home announcing that he used the lessons learned in role-playing, congratulate him. Give him a high-five, and tell him how proud you are—even if he didn't do *everything* you practiced. This is not the time to nitpick.

Role-playing didn't help Jesse right away. But one day, a few weeks after we began our sessions, he was beaming when he came into my office. Once again, a playmate had teased him, but this time Jesse hadn't struck back. "I told him I didn't care what he thought," Jesse explained.

Over time, as we continued our sessions, Jesse got even better at controlling his behavior on the playground. Other children accepted him as one of the gang, and that made him feel good about himself.

CAROL BRADY, PH.D., is a child psychologist in private practice in Houston.



# Writing Like a Big-Screen Pro

If your middle- or high-school student has trouble with writing, he may just need some direction. Share these Hollywood-inspired tips with your teen. **BY MICHAEL SANDLER**

**T**o write a five-paragraph essay, pretend you are a big-budget movie director. If you're like most teens, you love a good movie—the kind that keeps your attention with its strong plot, fully developed characters, and a story line that pulls together all the essential details to create a great ending. You can use some Hollywood thinking when you write your next school paper.

**ACT #1 Planning.** As you begin to write, pretend you are directing a movie. Think of the opening scene and how it needs to grab your viewers' attention. Imagine what your movie is about and where it's heading within the first five minutes. That's what the first paragraph of your essay should be like. Use a strong thesis statement to spell out your key points, where the paper's heading, and how it's going to get there.

**ACT #2 Writing Your Draft.** Are you good at brainstorming, but slow at putting pen to paper? Pretend you're trying to pitch your movie at a meeting of producers—the guys who will decide whether your idea is worth paying for. Grab a voice-recorder and talk through your thoughts. Don't forget to mention the most important and exciting points. Do you need to be more visual? Grab a dry-erase board and colored markers, and draw out your ideas. Do you have enough information to answer the producers' questions? If not, think through your story a bit more.

All right, you've got a great start. Now, pick your three strongest points, and turn each one into a paragraph. Think of each

paragraph as an act in your screenplay. What are the plot twists that will keep your audience on the edge of its seat? At the beginning of each paragraph, pull in your viewers with a strong opener, then give 'em the details in another four to 10 sentences. Finally, wrap it up with a punchy ending sentence. A conclusion reviews key points, creatively restates the thesis, and finishes with an inventive yet to-the-point final statement. In other words, give your audience something to think about.

**ACT #3 Editing.** A good movie isn't choppy. Remember to keep your paper flowing, from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. Keep asking yourself three key questions: 1. Does this sentence tie in to the last one? Does this paragraph flow logically from the previous paragraph? 2. Does each sentence enrich the main point of the paragraph? 3. Does it speak to the thesis statement and support your main idea?

Be careful not to let your creativity

lead you into subplots that detract from your main story. Stay on subject and lead the reader forward.

Instead of just proofreading, sculpt a masterpiece. Reread and rewrite each sentence. Strive for brevity, proper grammar, and correct spelling. Use strong verbs and avoid slang words. Instead of

having your character *run*, maybe he could bolt, scurry, or zoom from one action to the next.

Don't forget to call on your assistants—your computer's built-in spell- and grammar-check programs. When in doubt, get assistance from a tutor, teacher, or school librarian.

## It's a Wrap

Now do what Hollywood types do when they've finished their work—celebrate!

MICHAEL SANDLER is an ADD coach in Boulder, Colorado, and the author of *Conquering College with ADD* (Sourcebooks).





# Guiding Good Behavior: Tips from a Seasoned Teacher

BY PAULA ROGOVIN

**I**n my 34 years of teaching first-graders, I've found that children with the most challenging behaviors are sometimes the most fascinating, the most knowledgeable, and the deepest thinkers. They might go unappreciated—unless teachers look for their positive qualities while helping them improve their behavior. Here are some things that have worked for me.

► **Avoid humiliating children.** It's easy to call out the names of children with problematic behaviors. "Jack, don't do that!" "Gracie, don't touch that!" But not only does the rest of the class tire of hearing these refrains, it's terrible for the morale of the child who may not be able to control his constant movement.

**1. Choose seating wisely.** Have the dynamo sit near the teacher or other adult. That way, the teacher can whisper, rather than broadcast reminders, about behavior.

**2. Agree on signals.** Work together with the child on some non-verbal signals. For example, one child in my class was constantly tapping the floor or poking other children. He and I had decided that, when I looked directly at him and patted my knees, he would put his hands on his lap.

► **Plan for smooth transitions.** For some children, transitions from one activity to another, or from the classroom to the lunchroom, are difficult times.

**1. Review expectations.** Before every transition, I give a signal and review what is expected. I might say, "We are finished with writing workshop. You will put your writing folders in the box." When that is completed, I'll say, "You will bring your reading journal and a pencil to story circle." When children know exactly what is expected of them, it is much easier to develop and follow that pattern of behavior.

## Empowering children

From day one I say, "Be in charge of your own behavior," because I want the students to internalize the rules and to be responsible for monitoring themselves. One way to achieve this is to ask the kids to formulate some of the classroom rules. Sometimes I'll say, "Wow, you took away my job. Now, you're in charge of getting your journal and sitting in your place at story circle."

**2. Assign special jobs.** If a child has trouble with a task, such as getting his coat from the closet and waiting in line to go to lunch, I give him a special job while the rest of the class is getting ready. I will say quietly, "Braydon, hurry and get your jacket, then sharpen these pencils." Braydon is delighted to use our electric sharpener, and he knows he's making a contribution that actually helps our class.

**3. Stay close.** My students choose new line partners each month. I determine which pairs of kids are toward the front of the line. A child who has difficulty with behavior will walk closer to me. In some cases, a child will be my partner. This changes as a child's behavior improves.

PAULA ROGOVIN, the author of *Why Can't You Behave? The Teacher's Guide to Creative Classroom Management*, K-3 (Heinemann), teaches first grade at Manhattan New School in New York City.

## A hands-on curriculum

The more engaged children are, the better their behavior will be. A hands-on curriculum is essential. I ask my students what they want to learn. They might want to learn about racecars, a local construction site, zebras, and so on. We build the social studies curriculum on their interests, with lots of trips around the neighborhood.

# Homework Without Tears

12 ways to make homework a less stressful part of the daily game plan.

BY PERRI KLASS, M.D., AND EILEEN COSTELLO, M.D.

**A**fter a long day at school, homework can be tough for kids with attentional issues or learning disabilities—and for their parents, too. Here are strategies for wrapping up assignments:

**1 Start a homework group.** Invite one or two kids from your child's class to come over and do a little homework together. This can be an effective way to get a look at other children's studying strategies, and the chance to play for a while when homework is done is a strong incentive to do the work more efficiently.

How available do you, or some other supervising adult, need to be? You may want to set up a dedicated homework location. If your child's room is the place *most* full of possible distractions, the best spot might be some boring adult setting: a little desk in the living room or some space at the kitchen table.

**5 Reward accomplishments.** We are big believers in small, tangible rewards for small, tangible accomplishments. Finish your worksheet, and you'll get a cookie. Finish all your homework, and we'll go to the playground for 15 minutes before dinner. With the assignments your child really hates, there's nothing wrong with offering a grape or a gold star for every single successfully completed sentence on the worksheet or math problem on the list.

## 2 Consider your child's daily rhythms.

Most children do much better if they do their homework relatively early in the day—maybe not immediately upon coming home from school but certainly before supper. (Everyone deserves a break, and our kids, in particular, may need a chance for some physical activity before they have to sit down again.) Some quirky kids are notoriously early risers, and that can be a terrific time to get homework done.

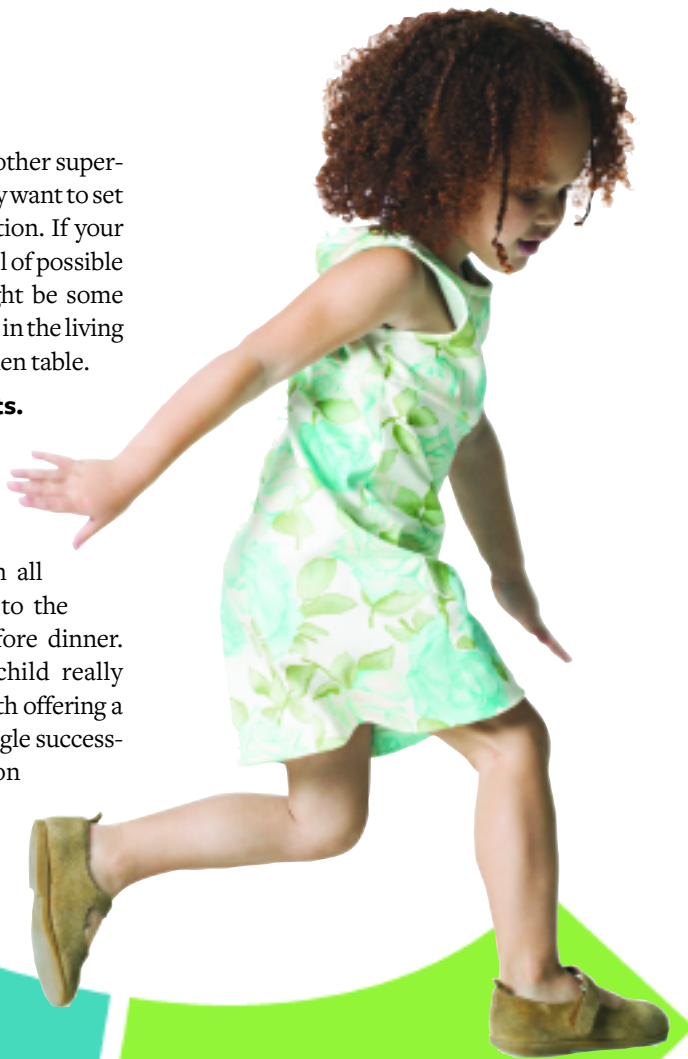
**3 Have a plan of attack.** Sit down and strategize the day's homework with your child: How much has to be done? What looks easy? What looks hard?

**4 Have a specific place to do the work.** How can you minimize distractions?

**6 Don't overschedule.** If you fill up every afternoon with sports, therapy sessions, and other activities, then homework will have to wait until later, and that may be hard. How about moving some of these activities to the weekend? How about getting your child accustomed to bringing his homework along if you know there's usually a wait in the physical therapist's office? Some schools send home a weekly packet of assignments due on Friday, or the following Monday. This allows for more flexibility in planning, and the final

product is more likely to be relatively neat and well thought out.

**7 Plan for supervision.** Think about homework supervision as you make your child-care arrangements. If you have a babysitter overseeing some of these after-school hours, give her clear instructions for helping with homework, and make sure she understands that, if possible, it needs to be done by dinnertime. If your child spends



time in an after-school program, is there some provision for homework? Many of these programs offer a supervised homework room, where kids can work in peace and get help if they need it.

instructions. Some teachers are available by e-mail, and some even post homework assignments on a website.

**10 Bend the rules.** By far our favorite homework activity for young children is reading—reading together, letting the child read to the parent, and, of course, letting the parent read to the child. If your child's worn out by the evening, take over more of the read-

**11 Use tools to plan.** Help older children plan their time—not just for any one evening's work but for the bigger, longer-term assignments. Some quirky children are unable to understand how to break these down into manageable steps, so a chart, a checklist, or a calendar, with separate due dates for each task, can be really helpful.

**12 Remember the power of praise.** Try to make homework a period that is associated with a

**HOMework**

**BEDTIME PREP**

**SLEEP**

**8 Organize.** For many quirky kids, just keeping track of papers is a big task. When an assignment is given at school, your child should know exactly where to put the paper so she'll be sure to bring it home. After homework is done, she should pack it in whatever special folder or backpack is going back to school the next day. The parent who picks up and drops off the child at school may need to double-check to see that assignments or completed homework has been packed. No matter how carefully you plan, every parent has, at some time or another, driven madly back across town one morning with the forgotten, left-at-home important assignment in hand. You just don't want to have to do it every day.

**9 Check in with the teacher.** If the assignments are not always clearly indicated, or if your child has trouble figuring out exactly what is expected, you should either check in with the teacher on a regular basis or establish a connection with another parent who seems relatively clued-in, so that you can, in a pinch, call for advice and

ing and let her enjoy the pleasant one-on-one contact. We'd like to express the hope that homework reading programs will recognize the pleasures and comforts of reading aloud and will allow children to select books that interest them. If you find yourself with a homework reading program that is taking all the fun out of it, you may need to make some discreet alterations at home—with or without notifying the school.

certain amount of praise, with some physical comfort, and even the occasional treat. It won't make your child love worksheets, but it may start to seem like a familiar, relatively pleasant interlude in the day—or at least, like a doable assignment.

Adapted from *Quirky Kids* (Ballantine), by PERRI KLASS, M.D., and EILEEN COSTELLO, M.D. Reprinted with permission.

### Is homework worthwhile?

If it seems to you that some of your child's assignments are not particularly valuable, bring this up with the school. We have seen children sent home with assignments that seemed, quite frankly, completely useless: coloring in pictures of Disney characters, copying words over and over in different colors. These jobs may be reasonably easy and entertaining for some kids, but if they're just creating frustrating busywork, you need to meet with the teacher and try to negotiate an exemption. No one ever suffered major consequences in later life from not coloring in a drawing of Minnie Mouse.

# Back-to-School Resources

Before the school year begins, spend some time on **additudemag.com/school** to find even more advice on working with teachers, helping with homework, and setting up your child to achieve success at school.



## Books

**Quirky Kids: Understanding and Helping Your Child Who Doesn't Fit In—When to Worry and When Not to Worry**, by Perri Klass, M.D., and Eileen Costello, M.D.

(Ballantine). Two pediatricians provide the expert guidance and illuminate the confusing list of terms often applied to quirky children—from Asperger's syndrome and nonverbal learning disability to obsessive-compulsive behavior and sensory-integration dysfunction.

**A Mind at a Time: How Every Child Can Succeed**, by Mel Levine, M.D. (Simon & Schuster). An expert in the field of child development and learning describes the complex workings of the brain, and offers parents and teachers insights for helping children who struggle in school.

**Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy**, by Pamela Wright and Pete Wright (Harbor House Law). *Wrightslaw* is widely regarded as the definitive manual for all parents of children with ADHD or learning disabilities. This book removes the guesswork from the special-education system. Read it before your next meeting to discuss your child's IEP or 504 Plan.

**Learning Outside the Lines: Two Ivy League Students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD Give You the Tools for Academic Success and Educational Revolution**, by Jonathan Mooney and David Cole (Fireside). With advice on “cramming like a pro” and skimming for comprehension, this tell-it-like-it-is guide is a must for any high school or college student with ADHD or LD.



## Software

**Kidspiration** (for grades K–5) and **Inspiration** (for grades 6–12). Mind-mapping software lets visual learners express their ideas for an essay or project in a graphic format and link them together later to create an outline. (both available from [inspiration.com](http://inspiration.com))

**Co:Writer 4000** A boon to struggling writers, Co:Writer reads aloud the words a user has typed. It also helps writers speed up their writing by completing sentences using common phrasing. ([donjohnston.com](http://donjohnston.com))

**Dragon Naturally Speaking** This voice-recognition software helps students put ideas on paper by typing as they speak. ([nuance.com/naturallyspeaking](http://nuance.com/naturallyspeaking))



## Websites

For general information on ADHD & LD:

### Chadd.org

CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) offers local support services to parents, teachers, and other professionals. Its website features an online community, an ADD directory, and information about your child's legal rights at school.

### Ldonline.org

The Learning Disabilities Online site offers parents, teachers, and kids a wealth of information about learning disabilities. The site features FAQs, expert advice, and several forums.

### Schwablearning.org

Schwab Learning's website features articles about managing ADHD and learning disabilities, getting financial assistance, and improving reading and writing skills. It hosts a parent-to-

parent message board, and it offers a weekly newsletter and an extensive list of software for students in all subject areas and grade levels.

For legal references and advice:

### Copaa.org

COPAA (Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates) helps parents secure high-quality educational services for children with disabilities. Search its website for member attorneys and advocates in your area.

### Wrightslaw.com

This website focuses on special-education law and advocacy for children with disabilities. It offers a comprehensive caselaw library, breaking special-education news, and an e-newsletter, as well as useful tips on writing an IEP.